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THE CRAYON.

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"OUR COINAGE."

The readers of THE CRAYON will find on another page an article, by an eminent sculptor, on the appearance of our national coins. It is high time to commence a crusade against the unnecessarily rude faces they present. There is probably no civilized nation whose coins are so unartistic as ours. Nay, we are sure that even those of China are more appropriately ornamented, since they do not pretend to anything beyond a significance, and that is complete. We aim at something artistic, and produce something that we have never liked to show in other countries. We well remember one day showing one of our gold coins to some fellow students in the school at Paris. One of them took it, and looking at the head, remarked quietly, and as though he feared to mortify us, "it is not at all well modelled," and we were compelled to say, "it is execrable." The head is bad on all the coins, from the cent up, but it is better than the eagle, and that, still better than the full length of Liberty. The only tolerable device in use is that in which the denomination of the coin is enclosed in a wreath of laurel; though the significance of this we could never comprehend.

The imprint on a coin demands two things to make it complete—significance and accuracy of design. The coins of most European governments present on one side the coat of arms of the country, and on the other, the head of the reigning sovereign. The former is traditional, and prescribes the traditional forms of all things represented—they are given for their meaning, not as artistic representations of the objects—and given with the same form and quaintness which they have borne for centuries, and which have become reverend from age and association. They are memoranda of the youth of the nation, inscribed with barbaric graphicality, and never to be modified or effaced. Heraldry is a system of hieroglyphic writing, and Art proper has nothing whatever to do with it. If we leave heraldry proper, and make an ornamental design for a coin, we work in subjection to the laws of taste, and that which we do is open to criticism as a work of Art.

Our country has no antiquity whose heroic achievements are commemorated by the hieroglyphic types of the college of heralds

—it cannot of course have a heraldry, and to attempt to get up a coat of arms for the United States of America is simply absurd. If we wish to adopt an emblem, it is very well, but let it be distinctly understood that heraldry has nothing to do with it, and that its representation must be in subjection to the laws of taste. We have chosen the Eagle. Good! He is a noble bird, and properly represented would make a beautiful medallion. The substitution of his head alone for that deformity labelled "Liberty," would be a good step, and in the hands of a good sculptor the bird would make a more beautiful coin face than any we know. But our eagle is an ornithological curiosity—a sprawling, straddling, ungainly, graceless thing, which any school-boy, who had ever seen a bird of any kind, should be ashamed to draw. It violates every law of anatomy and taste alike. There lies before us a half dollar of 1854, a late coinage. Will any man who is capable of seeing a difference between a golden pheasant and a Shanghai cock, look for one minute at the bird on that coin, and then say that it does not offend him!

Turn it over! You have what is supposed to represent Liberty—an effigy, but still not an heraldic one. We do not know where, or how, or by whom, it was designed—if, indeed, it was designed at all, and did not come by chance—but, we are sure that we could go into any French life-school, and find a boy of sixteen who would furnish, in half an hour, a better design than that in every respect. It is so badly drawn that it becomes perfectly ridiculous, and beneath criticism.

Why is this? It is not because there is not enough talent in the country to secure good designs. An expense of one thousand dollars would give us a complete set of designs which would make our coinage the most beautiful in the world—worthy of a poetic and picturesque country. The dies and coining would cost no more than at present, and, instead of the wretched things which greet us when we draw a coin from our pockets, we should see continually, works of Art—models which an aspiring young sculptor might emulate. It is an excellent point from which to begin a reform of national taste.

But, what to do! Who governs these

things? In England, and, we believe, through Europe, a practical artist directs them, and the models for the coins are made by some of the first artists in the country; but here, we cannot even determine upon whom to charge these atrocities.

Can we not have a National Fine Art Commission, who shall superintend not only this matter, but the Art interests at Washington—the ornamentation of our public buildings—the selection of pictures and statuary. It would cost nothing; for there are competent persons enough in the country who would willingly serve unpaid, and, even if they were well paid, the country would save by it, in not being obliged to pay the ridiculous prices they have paid for some of the national acquisitions in the Fine Arts line. It is just as easy to have these things well done as badly done, and infinitely more profitable in the long run.

PENNSYLVANIA FOREST SCENERY.

"He who attempts to subject the magic of nature to a dissection of all its component parts, enters upon a task of no small magnitude."—HUMBOLDT.

To those who are in search of the picturesque, either as an intellectual study, or for artistic purposes, we could recommend no more fertile ground than those extensive wilds, known by the name of the Beech Woods of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Entering that romantic gorge in the Blue Ridge, the Water Gap, through which the waters of the Delaware are seen flowing, the student of nature is at liberty to pass westward into the region we have selected for our subject, or, following the course of the river in among the fastnesses of the mountains until it reaches the mouths of smaller tributary streams, he will be enabled to follow them to their sources, and, by this devious route, reach the depths of the primeval forest.

Much of this scenery, though on a reduced scale, may be termed Swiss-like; yet, as a whole, its American character is such as makes it peculiar to this country. In nature, as well as in the noted productions of Art, we find that the objects which have excited the observation and drawn down the worship of mankind, have a much more powerful influence over the judgment, and make much larger demands upon critical analysis, than scenes of primitive grandeur, or works of obscure merit. On this principle the gospel of Art seems to be founded, and it is a principle of faith not only incidental to the works of nature and studies of pictorial and musical Art,